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## Fowler's CIA bill thoughtful

Let's clear up one popular misconception about the CIA straightaway: Call them "covert actions" or "special operations" or "Double-0-7 missions" or — they're not the chief order of business at the agency.

But extraordinary circumstances sometimes call for extraordinary CIA countermeasures, and it is to these occasions that U.S. Rep. Wyche Fowler has just directed a thoughtful bill to give Congress a voice in controlling secret CIA operations.

Under present law, the executive branch must tell members of the House and Senate subcommittees on intelligence oversight about clandestine operations, contemplated or just under way. Specially selected by Congress' leadership for their maturity, judgment and willingness to abide by secrecy rules and to accept this fearsome responsibility, these members can only review each operation; they are not empowered to approve or reject.

Fowler's proposal would give the congressmen a negative option: If a majority of the members of both subcommittees, upon consideration of a proposed mission, decided to disapprove, it would be scotched.

One of the best features of Fowler's bill is the clarity of the standards it sets for determining the worth of each mission: Is it essential to national security? Is it consistent with avowed foreign policy? Do its benefits outweigh its risks? Is it necessary because less-sensitive, overt alternatives would not produce the desired objective? These are all questions that would help distill the thoughts of the White House and National Security Council, which initiate CIA operations, not just to construct a persuasive case for the oversight

committees, but to confirm a mission's viability in their own minds.

Fully adequate safeguards are written into the bill to enable the oversight subcommittees' leadership to respond expeditiously in the event of an emergency and to provide for reviews of ongoing operations to ensure they stay within their predetermined parameters.



Wyche Fowler

The only nagging doubt about the Fowler bill concerns the politics of the negative op-

tion — the remote danger that subcommittee members might block an important operation for fear of voter retaliation if it went sour. Nothing in the six-year history of the subcommittees suggests that its members would run for cover. In addition, the Senate subcommittee would be insulated somewhat from political considerations, since at least a part of its membership would not have to stand for reelection for anywhere from three-to-six years after a crucial decision. Still, it is a worry, an issue that should be thoroughly aired as Congress debates the bill.

The rest of the bill is unquestionably sound; Fowler has made it plain he is not out to prohibit covert activities, but to strengthen the process by which they are undertaken. The administration should welcome the thoughtful participation of qualified members of Congress and their willingness to share the burden in making these ultrasensitive decisions.